

How To Build Effective Teams:  
Myths, Concepts & Strategies

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Learning Objectives

- Describe how to work effectively with others toward common goals.
- Identify common high- and low- functioning teamwork behaviors.
- Formulate first steps on how to get teams off to a better start.
- Explain frameworks for how to diagnose and solve common team challenges.

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A Few Teamwork Fundamentals

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*What we know about  
Teamwork at Northwestern*

"If I'm on an effective team,  
things will get even better!"

"I know if my team is struggling."  
(And things are probably going to get worse)

"I know if I'm performing poorly. Maybe I  
can just hide it?"

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*What we know about  
Teamwork at Northwestern*

**When people ask...**

1. How to rally others to a common purpose
2. For better communication
3. How to delegate
4. How to motivate
5. How to clarify vision, mission
6. New ideas

**People need to learn...**

1. How to inspire others through a common narrative
2. How to have healthy conflict
3. How to trust
4. How to listen
5. How to ask powerful questions
6. How to invite frank discussion

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*The advice we most often provide*

**Advance on Teamwork**

- Be on time and ready to contribute
- Demonstrate success through small wins
- Play to your strengths, and create opportunities for others to play to theirs
- Get to know each other outside of project work
- Know what success looks like, and use a project plan to get there
- Learn how to have an honest conversation

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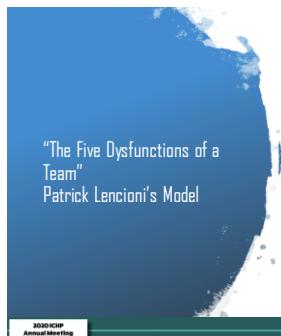
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5. Inattention to Results  
 4. Avoidance of Accountability  
 3. Lack of Commitment  
 2. Fear of Conflict  
 1. Absence of Trust

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## Teaming

The changing nature of work makes it difficult to know ahead of time required specific strengths

Teaming is an active learning process (not a static entity) that blends -

- Relating to people
- Listening to other points of view
- Awareness of other's needs, roles & perspectives
- Coordinating actions
- Making shared decisions




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## When to Use Teaming

To combine and apply people's expertise to perform complex tasks or develop solutions to novel problems

- People must juggle multiple objectives with minimal oversight
- People shift to multiple situations while maintaining high levels of communication and tight coordination
- Useful to integrate perspectives from different disciplines
- Collaborating across dispersed locations
- Pre-planned coordination is impossible or unrealistic due to the changing nature of work
- Complex information must be processed, synthesized and put to good use quickly




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## Teaming

### Individual Requirements

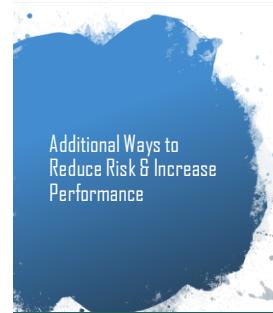
- Asking questions
- Sharing information
- Seeking help
- Experimenting with unproven actions
- Talking about mistakes
- Seeking feedback

### Team Requirements

- Awareness and integration of different perspectives
- Communication, despite different mental models and expertise
- Trust and cooperation, especially to manage inevitable conflict
- Willingness to reflect

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- Establish and maintain a psychologically safe environment (more on next slide..)
- Expect roughly equal contributions for group discussion, rather than letting one or two people dominate discussion
- Seek and pay attention to non-verbal cues, and help those with poor abilities or who are inattentive

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## Psychological Safety

"A climate in which people feel free to express relevant thoughts and feelings without fear of being penalized"

Can you and everyone else...

- ✓ Ask questions?
- ✓ Seek help?
- ✓ Tolerate mistakes?

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## How to Cultivate Psychological Safety

- Be accessible and approachable
- Acknowledge the limits of current knowledge
- Be willing to display fallibility
- Invite participation
- Highlight failures as learning opportunities
- Use direct language
- Set boundaries
- Hold people accountable for transgressions

Any Education

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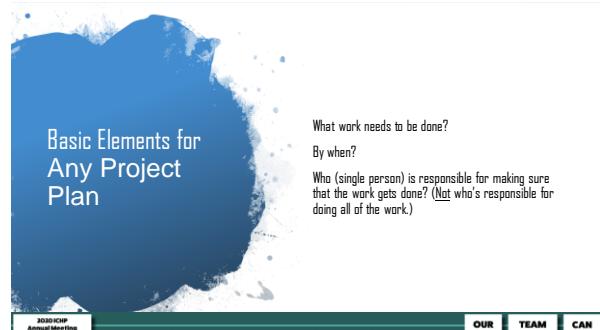
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**Basic Elements for Any Project Plan**

What work needs to be done?  
By when?  
Who (single person) is responsible for making sure that the work gets done? (Not who's responsible for doing all of the work.)

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**Functioning Effectively in Virtual Teams**

▪ Operate with clear, simple and written processes  
▪ Establish and maintain communication protocols  
▪ Meet together at least once weekly, ideally using video and voice  
▪ Show that you care about *both* the *people involved* and the *project*  
▪ Be sensitive to tone when writing to others  
▪ Choose a subdued and charitable tone to express dissatisfaction

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Thank you!

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Northwestern University

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